Nation was controversial during her life and she remains so in her death. She's been described as a religious fanatic, a crank, and exhibitionist, a misfortune, and much more. Typically, the descriptions include some suggestion of mental problems: insane, "psychotic from and early age," demented, dominated by a "well defined strain of madness," suffering from a "personal history of disease and convulsion," or "suffering from sexual frustration." She was clearly unconventional, but was she mentally ill? Although he never examined her, the famous psychologist Karl Menninger thought not.2

Photos of the dour Nation as well as her attacks on property and people suggest that she may have been mean-spirited. However, friends described her as gentle, loving and caring. Supporting this view is the fact that she appeared to be generous to a fault. Throughout her life she extended help and hospitality to those in need even when she was in no financial position to do so and even when it created serious marital conflict. She was

Carry received a teaching certificate but was fired from her teaching job and experienced severe financial hardship. She then met Dr. David A. Nation, an attorney, minister and newspaper editor 19 years her senior. In a marriage of convenience, she wed him in 1877.8 They bought a large cotton farm, although they knew virtually nothing about farming, and the enterprise failed. He moved to Brazoria, Texas, to practice law and Carry moved to Columbia, Missouri, to manage a hotel.9

In 1889, the Nations moved to the same town, Medicine Lodge, Kansas. There she managed a hotel and he became a preacher for the Disciples of Christ church. She started a local branch or "union" of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, was its president, served as the WCTU jail evangelist, taught Sunday School, and attended to the poor and needy.10

Carry was a strong-willed and domineering person who was not pleased with her husband's preaching.

She therefore decided to guide and instruct his work. Not only did she tell him what text to use, but she sometimes wrote his sermons, including in them attacks on tobacco and liquor and other iniquities. While he preached, she sat in a front row and acted as helper, instructing him to raise or lower his voice, to speak slower or faster, and to make proper facial motions. When she decided he had exhausted his subject, she might step into the aisle and declare: "That will be about all for today, David!" Sometimes he would fail to quit speaking whereupon she would walk to the pulpit, shut his Bible, hand him his hat and tell him to go home.11

In Medicine Lodge Carrie was becoming increasingly radical and vocal in her views and this began to cause concern among her fellow Disciples of Christ. In addition to her bizarre behavior in church,

She reached out to and ministered to the poor and the destitute, which was not always popular among her more class-conscious neighbors. She also claimed that she was receiving visions directly from God and that she had been baptized with the Holy Spirit. This was the last straw, and the Christian Church [Disciples of Christ] disfellowshipped her in 1892 for her views on the Holy Spirit.12

Nation promptly went to Kiowa, Kansas, gathered some rocks, and entered a saloon. Announcing "Men, I have come to save you from a drunkard's fate,"15 she began to destroy alcohol bottles and other objects by throwing the rocks. She similarly destroyed two other saloons in town, using not only rocks but brickbats, bottles, and a billiard ball as ammunition. Carry's attack surprised local officials, but because of the fact that the operation of saloons was illegal she was not jailed as she would be later in other communities.16 After her attacks, a tornado hit the state, which she believed was a sign of divine approval of her actions.17 She compared herself to "a bulldog running along at the feet of Jesus, barking at what He doesn't like."